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TAGS: PREL ASEC IZ JO

SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH ON IRAQI ELECTIONS AND ALLAWI VISIT

REF: STATE 254809

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (S) Summary: The GOJ remains deeply worried that January 31 elections in Iraq will produce either chaos, a Shia landslide, or both. King Abdullah reiterated his support for Allawi and his readiness to help with outreach to Iraqi Sunni Arabs if Allawi wants it. Allawi generated goodwill among some Iraqi Sunni in Amman. End Summary.

¶12. (S) Charge delivered reftel points, urging the GOJ to encourage Sunni Iraqi participation in elections, in the course of December 2 meetings with the King, including with visiting CENTCOM commander General Abizaid. King Abdullah said he considered Allawi to be "on board" for elections as scheduled. But both King Abdullah and Allawi were concerned over what happens if the atmosphere is not conducive to peaceful polls. Allawi was candid, the King said: the IIG is "committed" to elections, but, at the same time, it has to be flexible "and be reaching out to the Sunnis." The King said Jordan still supported elections January 31, and would do what was needed to help, including by encouraging Sunni participation. If there is a delay, Allawi should make clear that the reason is the need to include the Sunnis, not the insurgency.

¶12. (S) The King reiterated that the Amman conference of Sunni Iraqi Arabs, planned for November 10, was postponed at Allawi's request because of the operations in Fallujah. It will be Allawi's call, the King said, on when the atmosphere is right to reconvene a conference. Jordan was working hard to help; its support was "110 percent." "We can hold a conference in Jordan at any time" if the IIG requests it.

¶13. (S) King Abdullah made similar points during a December 1 luncheon with Senators Hagel, Biden, Feinstein and Chafee. The King said "we all want to make elections happen on time." But it will be hard to do so if instability continues. Elections will produce a parliament to write a constitution; how, the King asked, can that work if all elements are not represented? The King was worried that elections held without credible Sunni participation could lead to cantonization or civil war. If there is a delay of the elections, he added, it should be accompanied by a program and timetable for a new electoral process. An indefinite delay would be a mistake.

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A Shia Menace?  
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¶14. (S) Echoing a presentation made to the CoDel earlier by intelligence chief Saad Kheir, King Abdullah warned against Iran's "negative role." Iraqi Shias, loyalty was to Iran, not Iraq, and Sistani was working on their behalf, he said. The King painted a picture of a monolithic Shia Arab/Iranian threat to Jordan and Israel if they "take over" southern Iraq.

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Some Iraqi Sunnis in Amman Take to Allawi  
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¶15. (SBU) Meanwhile, PM Allawi and DPM Barham Salih met with a number of Iraqis in Amman, including Anbar province sheikhs, but there was still no sign of the large-scale conference that has been rumored for weeks. Post's Iraqi Sunni contacts were favorably impressed with Allawi, and claimed they were willing to take up his offer to ally against Shia extremists and work with him on persuading kinsmen in Iraq to participate in elections. Some claimed Allawi was considering convening a political conference in Dubai in the coming weeks.

¶16. (S) Comment: King Abdullah's support for Allawi remains solid, and he will take his cues from Allawi when it comes to dealing with the problem of maximizing Sunni participation in elections. The King is genuinely worried about the fortunes of Iraq's Sunni Arabs, which he sees as linked to Jordan's, and he shares the common Jordanian phobia toward Shi'ism. Post's Iraqi Sunni contacts were uniformly positive on their meetings with Allawi, but admitted that the kinds of emigres who would say otherwise don't meet with Allawi, or with us.

17. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.  
HALE